

FRANK R. WOLF
10TH DISTRICT, VIRGINIA

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OPERATIONS

TRANSPORTATION-HUD

CO-CHAIR—CONGRESSIONAL
HUMAN RIGHTS CAUCUS



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
December 17, 2007

241 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-4610
(202) 225-5136

13873 PARK CENTER ROAD
SUITE 130
HERNDON, VA 20171
(703) 709-5800
(800) 945-9653 (IN STATE)

110 NORTH CAMERON STREET
WINCHESTER, VA 22601
(540) 667-0990
(800) 850-3463 (IN STATE)

wolf.house.gov

Ambassador Michael W. Michalak
American Embassy Hanoi
PSC 461 Box 400
FPO AP 96521-0002

Dear Ambassador Michalak:

Congratulations on your new post as U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam. Your appointment to this position is very timely and you have the potential to positively impact the unacceptable human rights and religious freedom situation in Vietnam.

We recently read an exchange you had with journalists in Vietnam. When you were asked about the focal points of your work in Vietnam, you stated that you have many goals. You briefly referenced human rights, and the rest of your remarks focused on trade, cultural and educational exchanges, and economic development in Vietnam. Given Vietnam's poor human rights record, we urge you to move human rights to your highest priority during your time as ambassador.

After joining the World Trade Organization in January 2007, the politburo of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) has carried out a large-scale brutal campaign of arrest against the nascent movement for democracy in Vietnam. Ignoring all international criticism and strenuous protests of the Vietnamese people, inside Vietnam and abroad, the communist regime in Hanoi has shamefully pushed ahead with its crackdown. Among many others, the following events were particularly disconcerting to us:

On February 18, 2007, the second day of the Lunar New Year, which is the most sacred time in Vietnamese culture, the communist security forces raided Father Nguyen Van Ly's office within the Communal Residence of the Hue Archdiocese. Father Ly was later banished to a remote, secluded area in Hue. On March 30, he was sentenced to eight years of imprisonment on the charge of "propaganda against the State."

On March 6, 2007, two prominent human rights activists and lawyers, Mr. Nguyen Van Dai and Ms. Le Thi Cong Nhan, were arrested in Hanoi and were told that they would be detained for four months as part of an undisclosed investigation. On May 11, Dai was sentenced to five years and Nhan to four years of imprisonment. On November 27, the People's Court of Appeals only reduced their sentences by one year each despite the international outcry and appeal for their immediate release; the court invited several individuals to serve as witnesses, but the Public Security Police apprehended, assaulted and detained most of the witnesses that showed up.

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On March 8, 2007, Reverend Nguyen Cong Chinh and his wife were brutally assaulted by security forces of Gia Lai Province in the Central Highlands, who then arrested Reverend Chinh on undisclosed charges.

On March 9, 2007, Mr. Tran Van Hoa, a member of the People's Democracy Party in Quang Ninh Province, and Mr. Pham Van Troi, a member of the Committee for Human Rights in Ha Tay, were summoned by security forces and threatened with "immeasurable consequences" if they did not stop their advocacy for human rights in Vietnam.

Also on March 10, 2007, state security forces raided the home of Ms. Tran Khai Thanh Thuy, a writer, on the grounds that she advocated for "people with grievances" against the government. They took away two computers, two cell phones, and hundreds of appeals that she had prepared for victims of the government's abuses.

On March 30, 2007, two of Father Nguyen Van Ly's associates received long-term sentences: Nguyen Phong (six years) and Nguyen Binh Thanh (five years).

On April 5, 2007, the Vietnamese authorities in Hanoi rudely prevented Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez (D-CA) from meeting with several dissidents' wives at a gathering organized at the U.S. Ambassador's home. The police reportedly used very hostile and undignified manners to intervene in the meeting.

On May 3, 2007, four Hoa Hao Buddhists were sentenced for "causing public disorder": Nguyen Van Tho (six years), Duong Thi Tron (four years), Le Van Soc (six years), and Nguyen Van Thuy (five years).

On May 10, 2007, three pro-democracy and human rights advocates of the People's Democratic Party were sentenced: Jurist Nguyen Bac Tuyen (four years), Dr. Le Nguyen Sang (five years), Journalist Huynh Nguyen Dao (three years).

On May 11, 2007, five Khmer Krom Buddhist monks protesting government persecution were sentenced from two to four years of imprisonment for "causing public disorder": Danh Tol, Kim Muot, Thach Thuong, Ly Suong, and Ly Hoang.

On May 15, 2007, Jurist Tran Quoc Hien of the United Workers and Farmers Association, an independent labor union, was sentenced to five years.

On July 20, 2007, Nguyen Thanh Phong, a member of Bloc 8406, was sentenced to three years in prison for "misuse of democratic right."

Furthermore, the Hanoi communist regime is still imprisoning many political dissidents and labor advocates such as Nguyen Vu Binh, Huynh Nguyen Dao, Truong Quoc Huy, Nguyen Tan Hoanh, Doan Huy Chuong, the religious leaders of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam, Cao

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Dai, Hoa Hao, and more than 350 lay people of the Protestant churches in the Central Highland.

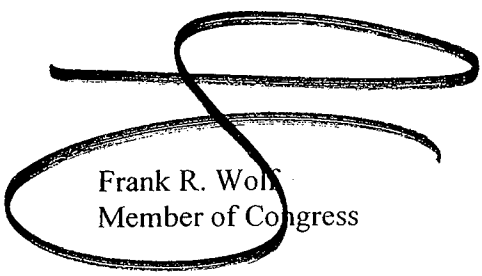
We share the concerns of the Vietnamese-Americans in our congressional districts, as well as across the country, who are very angered and distressed by what they perceive as a new and aggressive plan of the Hanoi government to reverse the progress of human rights in Vietnam. It seems to us that the Vietnamese government is conducting this crackdown on advocates of human rights and religious freedom because it believes that the U.S. has no further leverage in the region. Now that Vietnam has been admitted to the WTO and met with the Holy See, they believe they can respond in this brutal fashion to supporters of democracy and freedom and we will not respond.

Throughout our years in Congress, we have worked to foster human rights and religious freedom throughout the world. We have raised this issue with U.S. government officials often, especially since this recent crackdown, in an effort to pressure the Vietnamese government to stop persecuting its citizens. We believe the State Department should consider putting Vietnam back on the list of Countries of Particular Concern and actively advocate on behalf of the Vietnamese people. The Vietnamese people should be able to choose their own leaders through free and fair elections and to use the Internet freely without censure or restriction.

In addition to the well known human rights abuses in Vietnam, there is a less discussed but no less egregious human rights abuse occurring in Vietnam today-the abuse of missing girls. Enclosed with this letter, we have included a recent article from Time magazine about the gradual skew toward boy babies in Vietnam, a phenomenon of gendercide that is appearing in China and other Asian countries as well. We hope you find it of interest and strongly encourage you to openly dialogue with the Vietnamese on this issue.

We sincerely hope that you will make human rights and religious freedom your primary focus during your time in office, something that filters into every decision you make and every conversation you have with Vietnamese officials. Without someone to speak out for them, the persecuted in Vietnam have no hope.

Best wishes.



Frank R. Wolf
Member of Congress

enclosure

Sincerely,



Christopher H. Smith
Member of Congress